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ABSTRACT

This study examined a school district before and after its school board changed from appointed status to elected status to determine if there were significant differences in the board's handling of constituent demands. School board minutes were examined and demands were analyzed for a six-month period under the appointed school board, then compared to demands for six months under the elected school board. Results of the analysis showed significant differences in the control functions of the appointed and elected school boards in 6 of 15 demand areas. Of these, the elected school board was more responsive in the three areas of new teaching methods, student behavior, and community services. There were distinct differences in the control functions performed by the appointed and elected boards. However, only demands for new teaching methods were both quantitatively and qualitatively different under the elected board. There was strong evidence that the school board does exert political control in processing its decisions. This seems to disagree with some earlier studies, but the earlier studies concentrated only on money demands. By broadening the spectrum of demands analyzed, the present study found significant differences in political control functions that earlier studies had missed. (Author/JG)

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The Concept of Control Related to Decisions Under Appointed and Elected School Boards

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In recent times, schools districts have come under intensive study as political systems.[1] As defined by Easton, a political system controls or responds to the demands of its component systems. Easton's work in political science has resulted in a systems model for studying the decisions of school boards.[2] The boundaries of the school district serve as the physical limits of the school's political system. Within this system operating as the major authoritative decision-making group is the school board. Supports and demands flow into the school board. Supports in terms of moneys, gifts, and symbolic rewards like praise flow into the school board and decisions are made about them. Demands, too, for information, services, and money come to the school board, are processed and turned into decisions. Milstein and Belasco identified the political system of the school as highly dependent system causing it to accept and process demands and turn them into decisions almost without control or regulation.[3] However, it seems reasonable to assume that a school system is not totally responsive to all demands. The school board may still be able to control those demands and still attain its goals through its decisions in a number of ways.[4]

Control of the demands by the school board is achieved by feedback about the decisions to the various interests groups that generate demands. One important way to investigate this control function on these demands is when a school board changes its structure. It can change its structure by moving from an appointive structure where the city or town government appoints the school board members to an elected structure where citizens elect the school board. The major question

for this study then is: if a school board changes its structure from an appointed status to an elected status, does it then somehow exert different controls over the demands presented to it.

Control And Board Structure

It is an established fact that ninety percent of all school boards within these school organizations are elected rather than appointed to their positions.[5] Because of a societal commitment to the democratic process and an educational philosophy also committed to local control of schools, school board members and educational administrators alike have accepted the proposition that elected school boards are more responsive to demands which represent local community needs. However, this assumption has been seriously challenged.

Studies which impugn the concept that elected boards are more responsive to school demands emanated from the University of Chicago and Stanford University. When Campbell was at the Midwest Administrative Center at Chicago, he criticized local control of schools by theoretically showing that it was non-existent.[6] In a legal sense, schools are the vehicle of the state, and as such, their operations, said Campbell, were for state rather than local purposes. Later, James, then at Stanford, substantiated this contention by showing that large school district school boards did not budget their moneys any differently whether they were appointed or elected.[7] In at least one aspect of board control then, it did not appear to matter whether school boards were elected or appointed. Each board controlled the spending of school funds in a similar way.

Research Setting

The political control of the elected school board has been similarly questioned in the area of federal aid. Two studies, one from Stanford and the other from Berkeley found that it was the superintendent, not the elected school board,[8,9] that seemed to control the decision to apply for federal aid. This decision, it seemed, was left in the hands of the administrative specialists. Most recently, the finding was supported in a national study of thirty school districts varying in size from 750 to 500 000 students.[10] It was the control and energy of the administrators, not the control of elected or appointed school board, which seemed all important for obtaining federal aid.

However, still more research into the decision-making functions was badly needed, and one opportunity to do further research was presented in an upstate school district in New York. A moderately sized city with a K-12 school population of 3,200 students faced several unique school problems. One major influence on the school was the presence of a major Air Force base. Approximately 20 percent of the students in this district came from families connected with the military. In addition, another potent force acting on the district was a relatively large and growing unit of the State University system. These forces, along with a growing recreation industry, a stable trade in agriculture and dairying, and a small but broadening base of industry and business, raised questions about school board control.[11]

Method of Research

In 1970, the Common Council of the city requested that the school board move to independent status where it would be popularly elected instead of appointed.[12] To establish if the former appointed school board controlled

decisions differently from the elected school board, content analysis of school board minutes was used. Five broad areas of school functioning were used to classify the demands recorded in the school board minutes. These were school finance, curriculum, personnel, facilities, and issues of general concern. These five areas were, in turn, systematically analyzed and categorized into 23 areas covering all aspects of school organization.

Adding to the explanatory power of the findings, demands were further analyzed by the sources from which they emanated, either internal or external to the school system. An internal demand, for example, may have begun from the students, teachers, or administrators and required an internal change. In contrast, an external demand may have been generated from a person or agency outside the school system and required an external change.

Demand analysis took place in a six month period under the appointed school board structure in 1968-1969 and it was compared to the identical six month period in 1970-1971 under the elected board structure. Significance of the difference between two proportions with independent samples was used to analyze the demands. This statistic tested the assumption that each school board structure, appointed or elected, was a distinct board structure. Each one was assumed to be controlling demands in its own way.

Preliminary Results

Basic findings reported in TABLE I showed significant differences in the control functions of the appointed and elected school boards in six of 15 demand areas. In three areas, federal aid, curriculum additions, and clerical-maintenance

demands, the appointed school board processed significantly more, and hence, was more responsive and less controlling than the elected school board. However, not to be outdone, the elected school board also processed significantly more demands or was more responsive in three areas. These were in new teaching methods, student behavior, and community services.

Demands on the Appointed Board

In fifteen areas, the appointed school board performed similar control functions to the elected board except in the demand areas of federal aid, curriculum additions, and clerical maintenance personnel demands. Table I shows that the appointed board processed significantly more demands proportionally than the elected board. Content analysis also showed that federal aid demands under the appointed board were much less routine. They included approval of an NDEA proposal, the appointment of a director of a federal Follow-Through program, a report on the federal school lunch program, and a demand to establish district goals for federal aid. In contrast, the elected board processed only two ritualistic federal aid demands dealing with identifying the superintendent as the legal agent of the school district.

A similar finding was revealed in curriculum additions defined as wholly new instructional programs introduced into the regular school programs. Under the appointed board, curriculum additions were not only proportionally more frequent and, therefore, less controlled, but they were more broad. New textbooks were introduced, a report on a federal program was presented, and a request for greater teacher participation in curriculum was presented. The appointed school board also granted approval for a new driver education program and a new art program at the secondary level. In contrast, the elected school board processed only three demands for new textbooks. It appeared that the

TABLE I

POLITICAL DEMANDS OF THE SAMPLE SCHOOL DISTRICT UNDER APPOINTED AND ELECTED SCHOOL BOARDS 1968-1971[a]

Demand Area	Appointed Board 1968-1969	Elected Board 1970-1971	Z-score
School Finance			
School Budget	15	19	-1.79
School Taxes	5	3	1.03
Federal Aid	4	2	4.21**
State Aid	2	2	----
Total	26	26	1.26
Curriculum			
Present Teaching Methods	4	4	- .85
New Teaching Methods	-	3	-3.17**
Curriculum Additions	5	1	2.91*
Atheletics	1	1	- .33
Total	10	9	.50
Personnel			
Teacher Behavior	20	28	1.00
Student Behavior	7	17	-8.00
School Board Behavior	12	22	-1.00
Administrative Behavior	4	3	1.66
Clerical-Maintenance	9	6	2.05*
Total	52	76	- .91
Facilities			
School Facility Adequacy	15	22	- .33
General			
Community Services	--	6	-2.18*
All Demands	103	139	----

[a] A six month period for each school year was sampled

* Significant at the .05 level

** Significant at the .001 level

appointed board was far less controlling than the elected board in curriculum additions. However, not quite the same can be said for clerical-maintenance personnel demands.

Where these demands were concerned, it appeared that the appointed board proportionally processed more and exerted less control over demands concerned with the clerks, secretaries, and other maintenance personnel in the school district. These demands were more related to salary schedules, resignations, and leave requests among the non-certified personnel. These same types of clerical-maintenance personnel demands were processed by the elected school board. The distinction was there were significantly fewer of them and they were more controlled in proportion to the total personnel demands. This was accounted for by a change in the processing structure for personnel demands during negotiations where the personnel demands became part of the negotiation process. After 1969, more of the personnel demands were structurally shifted to the negotiations sessions between the administration and non-certificated negotiations unit. They were no longer subject to a full hearing by the school board, but were processed in closed negotiation sessions.

Demands on the Elected Board

In the areas of new teaching methods, student behavior demands and community service demands, the elected controlled fewer demands than and processed more than the appointed board. While the appointed board processed no demands for new teaching methods, the elected board treated three demands. Two of these were reports on new teaching methods presented by teachers, and the third concerned a proposal to have teachers devote more time to developing new methods.

The elected board also controlled fewer and processed more demands for students than did the appointed board. Seventeen students demands were treated by the elected board, while only three were handled by the appointed board. These student demands on the elected board more numerous, and they were also of a routine variety including requests by parents to bus every child in the district. Other demands handled by the elected board included several for non-resident tuition, school scheduling changes, a report on summer school, and routine information about student health insurance. In contrast, the appointed board handled student demands on transporting individual children, a presentation of a yearbook, and the selection of a commencement speaker.

In the community services area, the elected school board did significantly better than the appointed board. It was more responsive to six demands of the community including requests to use the school facilities, to organize the little league baseball teams, and provide services to non-profit groups.

Board Structure and Control Functions

There is no doubt of the distinct differences of the control functions performed by the appointed and elected school board in this study. Such a finding seemed to support the structural hypothesis that an appointed school board controls demands differently from an elected school board. Certainly, it is true that changing the structure of the school board in the sample district had an effect on the control of the demands which flowed to it from 1969-1971. Both school boards, the appointed one and the elected one, exerted less control over the demands in each of three different areas, but the question still remained about whether these quantitative differences were in deed also qualitative.

When further analysis was performed by the source of the demand areas where significant differences had appeared, the sources of the demands, either

internal or external to the school system, were identical. Table 2 shows the significant differences in sources of demands for both the appointed and the elected school boards. In the case of the appointed school board, there were two significant sources of demands internal to the system and one that was external to the system. The exact same pattern of internal and external demands occurred for the elected school board. That pattern showed two sources of internal demands and one source of external demand where the elected board performed similarly to the appointed one.

TABLE 2

Internal and External Demand Areas of the

Appointed and Elected School Boards

Appointed	Elected
Curriculum Additions - Internal	New Teaching Method - Internal
Clerical Maintenance - Internal	Student Behavior - Internal
Federal Aid - External	Community Service - External

Responsiveness Under the Elected Board Structure

By examining only the types of demands in Table 2 where the appointed and the elected boards responded significantly differently from each other, still another inference about school board responsiveness can be explored. Statistically, it was demonstrated that the appointed school board was less controlling or more responsive to demands in the areas of curriculum additions, clerical-maintenance personnel, and federal aid demands. In contrast to the responsiveness of the appointed school board, the elected school board appeared responsive in other areas of new teaching methods, student behavior, and community service.

It might be inferred, however, erroneously, that these findings support the notion that the elected board, in concert with the principles of local control, was more responsive to the needs of the students and community as a whole. However, close examination of the qualitative content of the demands showed that this inference was totally without a foundation. If the demands of the students are examined under the elected school board, they were routine and ritualistic request for busing, schedule changes, and health insurance. None seemed substantive, and none showed that the elected board was qualitatively more responsive to the students of the school district.

Under the elected board structure, only demands for new teaching methods were found to be both quantitatively and qualitatively different. With these demands, not only did the elected board encourage teachers, but it responded to demands by the teachers for greater recognition and participation in deve-

loping new teaching methods. By the responses, the elected board showed more responsiveness and less control over teachers than the appointed board.

Recapitulation of the Control Functions

There was strong evidence that the school board does exert political control in processing its decisions. The school board restrains or encourages certain groups inside or outside the school boundaries to present demands which become decisions. This was apparent where the sample school board changed its structure and then shifted its structure and then shifted its controlling functions to different demand areas.

Other studies cited earlier seem to be in disagreement with the present findings. In essence, these earlier studies argued that the school board structure does not influence school decision-making. More important than the school board structure, they stated that it was the demand, itself, that influenced the politics of the decisions. Particularly in the areas of school budgeting and federal aid, these studies found no significant differences in the controls exerted on school moneys or federal funds whether the school board was elected or appointed. However, the earlier studies had concentrated only on money demands. When only the money demands of the present study are examined under school finance demands in Table I, then both the earlier studies and the present study are in agreement. In the present study, Table I showed there were no real differences in the processing of money demands under the elected and appointed school boards with the exception of federal aid demands.

Significant differences in the controlling functions of the appointed and elected school board were only discovered when the demands under study were expanded and became more comprehensive to include demands in curriculum,

personnel, facilities, and issues of general concern. By broadening the spectrum of the demands processed by the school board, the present study was able to discover significant differences in the political control functions that earlier studies had missed. This important finding shows that a school district undergoing a structural change will also undergo an accompanying change in control functions. Not many school boards will experience the same type of structural change of moving from an appointed to an elected board but research on structural changes of the school board and their effects on school decisions is very scant. Consequently, the present study may lend credence to the hypothesis that when any other structural changes occur on a school board, changes such as reorganization, changes in board membership, recall of school board members, a concommitant change may be expected in the political control functions of that board.

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12. Independence, in this instance, is a form of school governance which refers to the change from an appointed to an elected school board. Although independence is commonly thought to involve only school taxing and budgeting powers, its definition used here is one of 32 forms of school board independence derived in studies of school organization. See reference in footnote number 7.

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